/21 cont./

565 608 This, however, does not exhaust the role of the ward with regard to his foster parent. He is the main character in the joys and sorrows of his foster parent; in all the occasions of his life that have any importance. Thus, when his foster mother, or her [765] husband, or one of their children dies, he bewails them bitterly, dresses in mourning, lets his hair grow, buys the coffin at his own [764] expense, and takes care of the arrangements and the ceremonial for the mourning and the funeral of the deceased. When the funeral banquet is given, he provides a sheep or a horse and again arranges everything. The ward also is the main character [583] when the son of his foster mother abducts a girl to be his wife; if the relatives of the girl pursue the abductor, the princely ward comes to his aid with words and weapons and does not give up the abducted girl; subsequently he keeps her at his house until the matter is definitely settled, for none of the relatives of the abducted girl would dare to attack his home.

If, on the other hand, the marriage of the son or daughter [584] of the foster father is arranged peacefully by the voluntary consent of both sides, then here, too, the princely ward is considered the bridegroom's best man and presents the bride with money, a horse, etc.

The foster parents in turn do not fail to perform their duties with regard to their ward, whom they call their sun, their /22/ sacredness, and by whose name they swear. Every year at [431] Christmastide they give him presents, such as cheese, capons, and bread; at Easter, a lamb or a kid and "chumukhkvati." These presents are the obligatory outward signs of sincere liking and friendship on the part of lesser ones ("lower brotherhood") towards those of higher rank; with their cessation the mutual friendship is also broken off.

The sons of the foster mother are usually the bosom friends [579] and accomplices of the ward in his nocturnal thieving adventures. That is why a prince or nobleman always takes the sons of his foster mother with him on his thieving expeditions; he knows that

/23 cont./

608 565 peasants also rear the children of clergymen, of merchants, and even of other peasants. There are also cases of even nobles taking in and rearing the sons of strong and influential princes on the same basis.

IV.

Marriage

583 Some fifteen years ago the groom usually abducted a girl for a wife; that is to say, without the consent of the girl's parents or her own consent, he carried out an attack upon her with the help of his comrades and led her away by force. Such cases are rare nowadays. On the contrary, abductions are now for the greater part carried out with the consent of the bride herself, though not infrequently against the will of her parents. In the latter case, the one chosen as a bride comes at night to a previously arranged place a few versts from the parental home. The groom comes to the same place with his comrades, on horses. She mounts a horse brought especially for her, and the whole cavalcade gallops back to the home of the groom or to that of some influential person. No pursuers are able to take the bride away from the abductors, for they are prepared, if necessary, to fight to the last drop of blood for her. Soon after the abduction the girl herself announces publicly that the abduction took place according to her personal wishes and that she can be happy only with her abductor. Mutual negotiations are now [584] initiated and everything ends in peace; the son-in-law brings presents to the mother and the father of the bride, and the case is closed.

584 583 [558] It must be noted that the Abkhaz never abducts a girl lower in standing than himself. This would be considered a loss of honor for the abductor. On the contrary, everybody tries to abduct a girl of higher or at least equal birth. To propose to a [154] girl and to receive a refusal either from her or from her parents

/23 cont./

584 [583] [54] is considered a mortal insult; /24/ in this case abduction is considered the only way of satisfying one's injured self-esteem. But usually marriage negotiations are conducted in Abkhazia by female matchmakers or by intermediaries. If they bring the matter to a happy conclusion, their labors are rewarded with the [465] heads and hides of the oxen that are butchered for the wedding. As soon as a mutual understanding has been reached, the bride and groom, after an exchange of presents, set a day for a meeting.

At the designated time, the groom and his friends set out, with presents, for the house of the parents of the bride. A [583] princely groom sometimes brings as many as 20 or 30 horses, of which many are saddled. Now a feast is held at the groom's [574] expense. During the banquet the friends of the groom, on the one hand, and those invited by the bride's parents, on the other, try in all possible ways to outdo each other in witticisms, puns, eloquence, in the amount of wine consumed, in singing, etc. The next day the comrades of the groom receive various presents and the groom himself receives a horse, or money and arms. Then the comrades return home, while the son-in-law remains in the house of the bride's parents with his delegate (dade).

But the future son-in-law still feels extremely ill at ease. According to the custom of the country, he may not yet show himself to the parents of the bride or their relatives. He is wrapped in a burka, and his head and face are wrapped in a bashlyk, under which only his eyes are barely visible. On the first night, during the feast, he hides himself somewhere outside and spends the night in a neighboring house. On the next day he is forcibly taken to the bride's house. But even now he does not dare to sit down and remains standing by the door, leaving it to his delegate to speak for him. In general it is not [606] proper for the young son-in-law to eat with his parents-in-law, or sometimes even to sit down with them at the table. In some places, husband and wife never appear together before the wife's parents. This is considered shameful.

The bride takes up residence in a small house (amhara),

/24 cont./

584 from which she does not emerge until a feast is held in the big house. Then she is led into the house, and one of the elderly friends of the family, or the father himself, puts a piece of liver on a spit and begins to pray and to express wishes that the couple before him may be happy, prolific, etc.

When the groom returns from the house of his bride's parents to that of his father, he again is not allowed to show himself to his parents and older relatives. This, too, would be considered /25/ indecent. He does not appear until after the feast has been given by his father. Now the same blessings and wishes that were given when the bride was led out of her amhara are repeated, and the groom gives presents to his mother, father, uncle, foster father, and in general to all older relatives. This feast bears the name aphkhasharkhe (portion of shame, remover of shame).

585 [583] After the preparation of the dowry, the bride's parents invite their future son-in-law in order to entrust their daughter to him; at the appointed time the groom comes to get her with his friends and her girl-friends. On the way home with the bride, [533] the marriage song bedniera (happiness) is sung, there is trick-[526] riding on horses, pistol-shooting, etc. When they are approaching the house of the groom, they send someone ahead to announce the arrival of the bride to the groom's father and mother. Such a messenger stops somewhere near the gates of the house and [202] without a word fires a pistol in the air. In the house he is offered some honey or sugar.

Meanwhile the wedding procession reaches the house. Here the friends and girl-friends amuse themselves for a while with a huge round loaf of wheaten bread, throwing it three times over the bride and over the house and breaking it into pieces, which are picked up by those present. After this the bride is led into the house, at the entrance of which two men hold swords crossed overhead. At the threshold she is offered honey or sugar, with the words, "May God give you a tongue as sweet." After the bride enters the house she is handed a cup filled with grains of gomi, on top of which an egg has been placed. Then she is led three times around the hearth while she scatters the grains of gomi. The bride is then seated, and they hand her a little boy

C 565 [760 cont.]
and noblemen and who had thus [761] become noble themselves;
C [566] and serfs (tšo'kŏtl). The last were either peasants and could not be sold individually, or they were servants and were sometimes freed (begaulia). The peasants had to attend to the needs and obligations of the nobles, and these to those of the princes, but in return received gifts from them. In the case of disputes and
C [637] on important occasions, princes, noblemen, and respected peas-
C [197] ants took council together. This feudal system was most highly developed in Kabarda, and the Kabardin were the teachers of the neighboring peoples as far as mode of living, horsemanship,
A [565] dress, and weapons were concerned. A pronounced aristocratic pride prevailed among the Cherkess, and their noblemen considered themselves as high as the princes of the Abkhaz and others. Therefore, at marriage the greatest weight was placed on equality of birth; sons of the princes by serf girls could become princes only through marriage with princesses, and then only princes of third degree.

C 439 The Cherkess sold many of the serfs and slaves to Turkey,
[567] where the Cherkess women were sought for their beauty; they
[565] were never daughters of the princes or noblemen, however, who were only to be won by their peers through marriage and bride price, but rather, except for personal slaves, they dealt in
C 560 Abkhaz women and captives from the Cossacks and other enemy
597 peoples. Slaves could achieve freedom through marriage to a Cherkess woman or through adoption; this was accomplished by having the slave, as mentioned above, suckle at the breast of the woman in question in the presence of the senior member of the kin group (cf. p. 76).

A 583 Marriage. Up to fifty years ago among the Abkhaz the young men, accompanied by friends, used to steal a girl of equal rank whom they desired as a wife. Today the abduction
A [584] takes place by an understanding with the girl or her parents, but usually the suitor works through a mediator (dade) or female matchmaker and pays a purchase price, besides the reciprocal gifts. Refusal of the offer results in abduction or alienation of the kin group.

A 585 After the betrothal banquet the groom remains for three days in the bride's house or in the vicinity, but he may not

A 585 [761 cont.] eat with her people or show his face, which he conceals with the hood of his coat. The bride now stays for a time in a special hut (amhara), after which a feast is arranged and she is blessed by the father of the house; the same is done for the groom when he returns to his father's house (apʻkhaǯarkhe = removal of shame). The customs at the wedding, which takes place after the trousseau is completed, are almost the same as among the Osset (see p. 76). The young bride continues to live in the aforementioned small hut and may not speak with anyone. The young married couple may not visit the parents of the groom at the same time for several years afterward, and the two of them may never eat with them at the same time. The man may never utter his wife's name, nor she that of her husband or those of his relatives, in front of others.

A [606] [593] [602] [551]

C 583 582 [762] Among the Cherkess, too, girls are seldom stolen now; the bride is acquired for money and animals. The men marry from fifteen to twenty-five, the girls from twelve to sixteen years of age. During courtship (nakekh) the priest (mollah) completes the marriage contract after closure of the sale, as among the Mohammedan Abkhaz, whereby he joins the hands of the representatives of the bride's people. About two months later the purchase price is turned over, and soon thereafter the two- to three-week wedding festivities take place, with which are associated several peculiar customs preserved best in Kabarda.

A 584

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The custom is so closely connected to the former abduction and defense by the kin group that, after the appearance of the bride, her mounted escorts defend themselves with their knouts against the youths, who stand in front of the house and attempt to unhorse them with poles until they succeed in jumping over the fence and gaining entrance to the house.

The groom is taken in for the wedding days as a "foster-son" (kan) by another kin group, from which he is assigned an escort (ǯatso-kot) of his own age, who attends him, hides him, since he is not allowed to meet older men until the "reconciliation" (see below), watches near him during the night, and rides about with him in the daytime in the hill pastures; here he gives him animals (ʻaga = for roasting), which he gives his people and